



Proposed Hanging Lake Area Management Plan White River National Forest

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q. What did the Draft Environmental Assessment reveal?

A. Forest Service specialists assessed the environmental impacts of the Hanging Lake Proposed Management Plan and found that the proposed Plan would result in positive effects to the area's ecological resources such as vegetation, wildlife habitat and stream health. Additionally, the draft Environmental Assessment (EA) found that the Plan would manage congestion, improve visitors safety and recreation experience, and continue to support local tourism by ensuring Hanging Lake is a place people can visit for years to come.

Q. How many comments did the proposed Plan receive in the first public comment period?

A. During the public scoping period, the Forest Service received 140 comments, the majority of which were supportive of the proposed Plan. Commenters were mostly interested in the details of implementation of the proposed Plan.

Q. What are the next steps in the process?

A. The release of the draft Environmental Assessment and the publication of the legal notice in the Vail Daily on **Dec. 21, 2017**, initiates the final 30-day public comment period. During the comment period, the public will have a final opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Plan and the draft Environmental Assessment. It is most helpful to comment during the legal scoping period and keep comments specific to the proposed Plan and draft Environmental Assessment. Those wishing to gain standing for objection must comment within one of the legal comment periods. After the comment period is over, the Forest Service will work to release a draft Decision on the proposed Plan sometime after January 2018.

The Prospectus Process: If an affirmative decision is made on the proposed Plan, the Forest will initiate a prospectus process that formally seeks bids from interested third-party service providers to operate the transportation provider service. During a prospectus process, businesses who are interested in providing the transportation service will submit a business Plan and bid on the service. The Forest Service will then decide which provider fits best within the parameters of the prospectus, the proposed management Plan and with related USFS regulation and policies.

The proposed management Plan and draft Environmental Assessment will be loaded onto the project page on Dec. 21 at this link: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=50479>.

Q. Why do we need a Management Plan for the Hanging Lake Area?

A. Hanging Lake, has become one of Colorado's "bucket list and must do" hikes for visitors from all over the world. Hanging Lake is distinctive not only for its beauty but for its geological composition – a large and rare example of a travertine deposition lake and hanging garden Plant community.

Visitation to Hanging Lake, a National Natural Landmark, has doubled in the last 5 years. In 2016, approximately 150,000 visitors came to hike to the lake and in 2017 approximately 184,000 visitors visited Hanging Lake. That is a 34,000 person increase in one year! The uniqueness of the lake, accessibility and widespread promotion has prompted this increase in visitation. As visitation to the lake

continues to rise, the results are natural resource and facility degradation, safety issues, parking congestion all of which impacts visitor's experiences.

The proposed Plan is intended to address high visitor use and its related issues with an adaptable, long-term strategy to protect the natural and historic resources, reduce congestion, and provide for public safety and quality recreation opportunities, all with a focus on long-term sustainability and for the area and its local economic contributions.

Q. What kind of degradation is happening at Hanging Lake?

A. High use visitation at the Hanging Lake area over the last decade has resulted in damage to the area's sensitive vegetation, historic resources, and infrastructure within the area. Increased visitation has also resulted in congestion and crowding in the parking lot, on the trail, at the Lake. Illegal parking in the lot, along I-70, and the on and off ramps has been an issue. Congestion also causes hikers to step off the trail compacting sensitive soils and damaging vegetation and widening the trail.

Q. How long has the Forest Service been working on management issues at Hanging Lake?

A. An interagency group convened in 2012 to address increasing safety and management issues. Due to the area's complicated land ownership, unique legal authorities, safety issues, and potential alternative transportation needs the Forest Service partnered with the U.S. Department of Transportation's, John A. Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (Volpe Center) in 2013 to assist in facilitation and development of potential short-term, mid-term and long-term solutions. Now after 4 years of implementing short and mid-term operational solutions, the proposed Plan represents the next step in the process, which is to arrive at a long term solution that will sustain the Hanging Lake area's natural resources and operations into the future. The Volpe Center's research and site specific studies were used to create the proposed Plan.

Q. How did the Forest Service determine the capacity?

A. A daily capacity of 615 was determined through information provided in Volpe's 2016, Capacity Analysis, and the 2017 Transportation and Operations Plan. Several scenarios were analyzed which looked at the capacity of the parking lot, trail, and the lake. The studies examined the movement of visitors through all three of those locations. The capacity study was done to assist the forest in determining the optimal capacity for the site in order to address operational sustainability and issues related to natural resource degradation, congestion, safety, over-crowding and visitor experience.

Q. How did the Forest Service determine the need for a transportation provider?

A. The need for a transportation provider was analyzed in order to address management issues occurring in the Hanging Lake area. Requiring a transportation provider during the peak season (May 1-Oct. 30) addresses the issues of congestion, capacity and public safety and would be used to manage and allocate the daily capacity. During the "off peak" season (Nov. 1 - April 30), the area would be managed to its daily capacity through a fee-based reservation system or permit system and mandatory transportation service would not be required but could still be offered.

Q. What is adaptive management and how is it being used in the context of this proposal?

A. Utilizing an adaptive management approach helps managers ensure that desired objectives are obtained and the intent of the Plan continues to be realized in the face of unknown future changes. Adaptive management defines desired conditions, indicators, thresholds and resulting adaptive management actions that will ensure long-term management meets the intent of the Plan. The process

is meant to be transparent, informative and dynamic with the ultimate goal of adopting a management system for Hanging Lake Area that is implementable and sustainable.

Q. What is the ultimate goal of the Hanging Lake Management Plan?

A. The overall goal of this management Plan is to create and implement a management system for Hanging Lake Area that is implementable, sustainable and meets the following objectives:

- Protect natural resources
- Manage congestion
- Enhance public safety
- Improve visitor experience
- Support local tourism

Q. Will this proposed Plan implement a reservation system? Will there be a fee?

A. A reservation system would be utilized to ensure that the daily capacity is managed to, thereby meeting the objectives of the proposed Plan. Visitors would secure a reservation or “permit” year-round which would define a time of entry either for a transportation service during “Peak Season” or access in their private vehicle during the “Off Peak season”. All visitors would need to secure a reservation/permit year round no matter the mode of transportation to the site.

The reservation system may be managed by a commercial provider, partner organization Recreation.gov or the Forest Service. A reservation fee most likely will be charged to cover the administrative costs of managing such a system. Any reservation system used will ensure the public has fair and equal opportunities to access and obtain a reservation. The actual cost of a reservation/permit will not be part of this decision. Fees will be based on who and what the service provider is providing to the public, ie. Transportation provider during the “Peak Season”, or reservation/permit for bicyclists, or permit to park during “Off Peak Season”.

The Forest Service can use a number of options to implement a reservation system. The following describes some of the potential tools that are available to implement the decision if the proposed Plan becomes final. The options below can be used alone or in combination with other alternatives:

1. Utilize www.Recreation.gov to issue reservations through the National Recreation Reservation Service. There is an administrative fee for this reservation system.
2. Manage capacity through the Outfitter and Guide (O&G) program via its permitting process using the Outfitter and Guide’s reservation system.
3. Manage capacity through a third party transportation provider’s reservation system.
4. Provide for enhanced visitor services and operations as well as resource restoration, reclamation, maintenance and protection of the site via a Special Recreation Permit under the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA). A permit under REA would generate revenue for sustainable on-site management. This would require following national and regional processes and would include a separate public participation process. This tool may be phased in and integrated into the above four options.

Q. How will the Forest Service enforce this Plan?

A. If the proposed Plan is adopted, the Forest Service will work with affected agencies and partners, service providers, volunteers, Forest Service Law Enforcement and Forest Service Protection Officers, to implement the Plan.